DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 986 CS 210 068

AUTHOR DeGroff, Linda-Jo Caple; Leu, Donald J., Jr.
TITLE An Analysis of Language Arts Textbooks from a Process-Approach Perspective.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986). Document contains light, dot matrix type.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Content Analysis; Elementary Education; Instructional Materials; *Language Arts; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Teaching Methods; *Textbook Evaluation; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes; *Writing Research

ABSTRACT

A study examined three recent language arts textbook programs for grades one through six to determine the frequency of writing activities, the nature of the writing tasks, and the frequency of process-approach activities such as selecting topics, prewriting, sharing, revising, and publishing. The programs analyzed were Scott, Foresman's "Language: Skills and Use," "Harper & Row English," and "Macmillan English." The results indicated that these textbooks provide elementary school students with opportunities to write an average of one piece of extended writing per week, on a topic usually imposed by the text rather than chosen by the students. Prewriting activities and sharing work with teachers or peers were generally omitted. Revision, which was seldom suggested, most often focused on editing surface features rather than on content, and the programs do not provide for publication or highlighting of students' written works. The results suggest that (1) students should be provided with more opportunities to write extended discourse; (2) such activities should be moved to the central part of the respective lessons; (3) writing mechanics can be addressed in either the supplemental nonextended activities or during editing of extended works; (4) extended writing activities need to consistently provide opportunities for generating lists of writing topics based on students' prior knowledge, for prewriting activities, and for sharing work with peers and teachers; and (5) textbooks could do a great deal to show teachers and students how to select topics, prewrite, share, revise, and publish. References and tables are appended. (HTH)

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An Analysis of Language Arts Textbooks from a Process-Approach Perspective

Linda-Jo Caple DeGroff

Donald J. Leu, Jr.

Syracuse University

170 Huntington Hall

Syracuse, New York 13244

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association

(San Francisco, 1986)

CS 210 068

Abstract

This study examined three recent language arts textbook programs to determine the frequency of writing activities, the nature of writing tasks, and the frequency of process-approach activities such as selecting topics, pre-writing, sharing, revising, and publishing. Results indicate that elementary school students receive in their language arts textbooks opportunities to write an average of one piece of extended writing per week. Typically, the topic of the piece is selected by the text rather than the student; there is no pre-writing activity; the piece is not shared with a teacher or peers; revision, which is seldom suggested, focuses on editing surface features, not content; and students' products are not published. Recommendations for improvements in writing activities are considered.

Recently, there has been increasing interest in writing instruction, especially at the elementary level. This interest has been both reflected and driven by research on writing processes (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Graves, 1975), by works prescribing instructional practices (Calkins, 1983, 1985; Gordon, 1984; Graves, 1983), and by national reports on education (Anderson, et al., 1985). Conclusions drawn from these works indicate that students need to be provided with more writing opportunities. In addition, they suggest that students should write extended forms of discourse rather than isolated words, unconnected sentences. Finally, they point out that instructional attention should be directed toward writing processes rather than writing products.

Graves (1983) and Calkins (1985), as well as others (Applebee, 1981; Dyson, 1984; Florio & Clark, 1985; Gundlach, 1982; Macrorie, 1980), have demonstrated how process-approach instruction addresses these concerns. They recommend that students at all grade levels write often, that students write forms such as personal narratives, and that the processes, not the products, of writing receive greatest attention. According to this perspective, several components of the writing process need to be incorporated into writing instruction: selecting topics, pre-writing, sharing, revising, and publishing.

One way to determine how these instructional recommendations are being translated into practice is to analyze language arts textbooks and determine: 1) the frequency of writing activities, 2) the frequency with which students write extended and nonextended discourse forms, and 3) the extent to which

instruction incorporates the major components of the writing process. Earlier, Graves (1977) reported that elementary language arts textbooks published between 1969 and 1975 emphasized the development of writing mechanics rather than composing. When composing was provided for in language arts texts, the activities for primary grade children were frequently limited to sentence level tasks rather than extended discourse forms. Graves also found little concern for writing processes other than at the pre-writing phase in his analysis of textbook activities.

A second study (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985) analyzed writing activites in language arts texts published between 1978 and 1980. Bridge and Hiebert concluded that little had changed in terms of frequency, form, or concern for the writing process in textbook activities published since Graves' (1977) research. Mechanics rather than composing continued to be emphasized. Composing activities frequently required word or sentence level responses rather than the creation of extended texts. Components of the writing process were largely unattended to in language arts texts' activities.

While one might conclude from these two previous studies that language arts textbooks do not yet reflect recent research and instructional recommendations, it should be noted that they did not analyze books published within the last six years. The purpose of the present study is to determine if the writing activities in more recent language arts textbooks have changed to reflect research and related instructional recommendations. The study addresses issues concerning the frequency of writing, the

nature of writing tasks, and the frequency of process-approach activities such as selecting topics, pre-writing, sharing, revising, and publishing. Two specific questions are addressed: 1) What is the frequency and nature of writing activities in language arts textbooks? and 2) How often are aspects of the writing process considered in textbook activities?

Methods

The language arts programs analyzed in this study were Scott, Foresman's Language: Skills and Use (1984), Harper & Row English (1983), and Macmillan English (1979). Activities in the teachers' manuals for grades one through six were examined; in all, 18 manuals were included for analysis.

Procedures

Three raters shared in the coding of activities described in the three language arts programs. Coding categories were defined intially and revised after trial coding of sample activities.

Activities were identified through the directions provided in the student text and/or the teacher's manual. Only instructions to the teacher or the student that were included in the set of directions for an activity were considered. For an activity to be termed a writing activity, the directions needed to indicate that students rather than the teacher would actually write. Furthermore, the writing needed to consist of student generated words, phrases, or sentences. Activities that required students to copy or select from examples provided by either the textbook or the teacher were not considered as writing

activities. Dictation to the teacher was not considered as a writing activity.

In order to accurately describe the frequency of writing activities, a distinction was made based on the location of writing activities in lessons. Two types of locations were identified: writing activities in the central section of a lesson and writing activities in the supplemental section of a lesson. Writing activities which were central to a lesson typically were defined through directions which appeared in both the teacher's manual and the student text. Writing activities which were supplemental to a lesson were not considered to be integral to the lesson. Directions for supplemental activities appeared only in the teacher's manual and were usually labeled as enrichment, extension, follow-up, or activities for students with special needs.

Central and supplemental writing activities were then coded for discourse form. First, a distinction was made between nonextended and extended writing activities. Writing activities requiring students to generate a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a series of unconnected sentences were considered to be nonextended writing activities. Writing activities requiring students to write more than one sentence on a single topic were considered to be extended writing activities. The major discourse forms for extended writing activities included narratives, descriptive paragraphs, letters or notes, how-to's, reports, poetry, and plays, scripts, or dialogues.

Because of the previous findings indicating an emphasis on

skills related to mechanics, each writing activity (both nonextended and extended) was examined in terms of the necessity for the student to attend to mechanics during the writing task. Specific mechanical skills included capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, sentence forms, and structural features of particular discourse forms such as titles for stories or salutations in letters and notes.

Finally, extended writing activities were coded for attention to several aspects of the writing process: selecting topics, pre-writing, sharing, revising, and publishing. A distinction was made between topics that were student selected or text selected. Topics were considered to be student selected when students defined them, not the textbook. It was inferred that in such cases students would write on topics of their own choice, and presumably ones on which they had prior knowledge. Topics were considered to be text selected when they were defined in the directions of the teacher's manual or the student's text. It was inferred that the amount of prior knowledge available to students in such cases would, on average, be less than for student selected topics.

Pre-writing activities typically serve to help students develop and integrate prior knowledge. Pre-writing activities contributing to the development of prior knowledge were thought to include those which called for students to read or listen to literature or works of reference, to look at pictures or other media, or to engage in concrete experiences such as field trips, observations, or interviews. Pre-writing activities contributing to the integration of prior knowledge were thought to include

those which called for discussion, drawing before writing, or the creation of word lists, notes, and outlines prior to the central writing task.

Two distinctions were made about sharing of students' texts. The first concerned who would participate as respondents to writers in the conferences or sharing sessions. Textbook directions suggested that writers share their work with the class, the teacher, a peer, or self. The second distinction concerned the purpose for sharing. One purpose for sharing was to receive feedback which aids revision. Another purpose for sharing was to provide students with an opportunity to give oral presentations of their written work. In these cases, the work was considered a final product and audience feedback was not solicited for the purpose of aiding revision.

Revision was indicated by the requirement that students make changes in their work or create multiple drafts. When revision was indicated, coding reflected whether students were directed to make changes in content, surface features, or both. Coding for revision was done only when directions for revision were integrated into specific writing activities. Some textbooks contained checklists or suggestions for how to revise and edit which were not referred to in the directions for any specific writing activity. In such cases revision was not integrated into the activity and, therefore, was not considered in coding.

The final aspect of the writing process addressed in coding was publication. Writing activities which incorporated publication did so by calling for the display of students'

written products in books, on bulletin boards, or in the case of letters, given or mailed to the addressee.

Three raters shared in the task of coding the activities in the language arts textbooks. In order to establish inter-rater reliability, the raters met and coded a random sample of 20 activities from each of the three programs. These activities were discussed and a final coding was agreed upon by all three raters. The group coding decisions were then compared to the original codings done by individual raters. Agreements and disagreements between the individual and group coding decisions were noted. There was mean of 86 percent agreement between individual and group decisions across all coding categories.

Results

Frequency and Nature of Writing Activities

How often are children expected to write according to textbook programs? One way to answer this question is to consider the total number of writing activities identified in the 18 textbooks analyzed in this study. This information is presented in Table 1.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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On average, each of the eighteen books analyzed in this study contains 162.56 writing activities (SD = 114.13, range = 13 to 329). Assuming a school year with thirty-six weeks, these

textbooks provide an average of 4.52 writing activities per week (SD = 3.17, range = 0.36 to 9.14). Generally, the frequency of writing activities in grades one and two is substantially lower than the frequency of writing activities in grades three through six. This pattern is consistent across each of the three programs. It should also be noted that the two newest programs contained approximately three times the number of writing activities as the oldest program.

Although an average of 4.52 writing activities per week may suggest that these textbooks provide frequent opportunities to write, one must keep in mind that this figure includes both extended and nonextended writing activities. When only extended writing activities are considered, the picture becomes somewhat modified. On average, each of the eighteen books contains a total of 92.06 extended writing activities (SD = 71.53, range = 6 to 220) or 2.56 extended writing activities per week (SD = 1.99, range = 0.17 to 6.11). The frequency of extended writing activities in grades one and two is substantially lower (range [per week] = 0.17 to 1.69) than the frequency of extended writing activities in grades three through six (range [per week] = 1.26 to 6.11). This pattern was again consistent across each of the three programs with the two newest programs containing approximately three times the number of extended writing activities as the oldest program.

The figures above, however, include extended writing activities that are both central and supplemental to lessons. When only those extended writing activities that are central to lessons are considered, the picture becomes further modified. On

average, each of the eighteen books contained a total of 39.33 extended writing activities that are central to lessons (SD = 30.14, range 0 to 81) or 1.09 per week (SD = 0.84, range = 0.00 to 2.25). Previously noted grade and program patterns were repeated. The frequency of central, extended writing activities is substantially lower in grades one and two (range [per week] = 0.00 to 0.81) than in grades three through six (range [per week] = 0.58 to 2.25). The two newest programs contained approximately twice as many central, extended writing activities as the oldest program.

Aspects of the Writing Process

How is our current understanding of the writing process reflected in the extended writing activities of language arts texts? Do the extended writing activities in textbooks call for students to select topics, pre-write, share, revise, or publish? Results in Table 2 indicate that little attention is directed to writing processes. The case of pre-writing may be the one exception. The oldest program which also had fewer extended writing activities, actually addressed process concerns more often than the newest programs.

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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Students generated topics for writing in only 16 % of the extended writing activities. In the remaining activities, topics

were specified in the textbook or by the teacher.

In the combined programs, only 46 % of the extended writing activities included some form of pre-writing activity. When pre-writing was included, reading or listening to literature or reference materials was the most common method for developing prior knowledge of a topic (17 % for the combined programs). Looking at pictures or other media occurred about half as often (9 %). Providing concrete experiences was seldom suggested (1 %).

Discussion was the most common pre-writing activity for integrating prior knowledge, but was included in only 11 % of extended writing activities. Pre-writing notes or outlines were used in only 8 % of the extended writing activities. Drawing before writing was used in a mere 4 % of the extended writing activities and generally was limited to texts in the first and second grades.

Only 27 % of the extended writing activities called for students to share their texts (see Table 3). Students were directed to share their work with the class in 15 % of the extended writing activities. Nine percent of the extended writing activities instructed students to reread their texts, a form of self-sharing. Three percent directed the student to share with a peer.

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INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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As can be been in Table 3, sharing most often served as a

presentation or a performance. In only 20 % of the extended writing activities, directions suggested that students read their work to themselves or others. On these occasions, no revision was called for after sharing. Only 6 % of the extended writing activities required sharing for the purpose of aiding revision.

Revision was required infrequently (see Table 4). Only 5 % of the extended writing activities across programs suggested that students revise their work. When revision was suggested, editing surface features received more attention than revising meaning related content.

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INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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The final writing process component, publishing, was included in only 7 % of the directions for extended writing activities (see Table 2). Typically students had no choice of in publishing. Directions called for the teacher to post all the papers written for an activity on the bulletin board. Sometimes the papers of the class were collected and bound in some manner to make a class book on a topic.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined three language arts textbook programs to determine the frequency of writing activities, the nature of writing tasks, and the frequency of process-approach activities such as selecting topics, pre-writing, sharing, revising, and publishing.

As a whole, those language arts programs provide writing opportunities for students on the average of once a day throughout their elementary school years. However, programmatic and grade level differences show another picture. The most recently published programs offer nearly three times as many writing activities as the program published in 1979. In addition, there were few writing activities in any of the programs for children in the first and second grades. This latter finding is inconsistent with work done illustrating both the ability and the needs of younger students to write (Avery, 1985; Bissex, 1980; Calkins, 1983; McCurdy, 1984).

How often students actually write may also be influenced by the location of writing activities in textbooks. Less than half the writing activities identified in this study were located in the central part of the lesson. The remaining activities were found only in the teachers' manuals, and therefore were supplemental to the lesson and less likely to be assigned or completed by students.

Are all writing activities of equal value? Authorities on writing instruction (Applebee, 1982; Bridge & Hiebert, 1986; Calkins, 1985; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1982) suggest that students need to write extended forms of discourse rather than perform sentence completion tasks or other forms of nonextended writing. Only half of the writing activities in the language arts programs called for extended writing on a single topic; of these, only half were located in the central part of the lesson.

Approximately two-thirds of the extended writing activites

required students to attend to mechanics at the time of composing. It has been noted that such demands place considerable strain on the students' ability to attend to expressing meaning which is the purpose of writing (Calkins, 1985; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984; Smith, 1982).

The language arts textbooks surveyed in this study devote little attention to writing processes. Topics for extended writing activities were typically assigned rather than generated by the students. Prior knowledge of a topic has been demonstrated to be an important factor in writing outcomes (DeGroff, 1984; Langer, 1985; Rosenthal et al., 1985). Whenever writing topics are assigned, there must be concern for how students' prior knowledge of that topic will influence their ability to successfully complete tasks.

Prior knowledge can also be considered in the pre-writing phase of lessons. Slightly less than half the directions for extended writing activities incorporated a pre-writing component aimed at developing or integrating prior knowledge. When pre-writing activities were provided, reading or listening were most often used to develop prior knowledge; discussion served to integrate knowledge.

Language arts textbooks seldom call for students to share their work with others. When sharing takes place, students typically read their work to the class or to themselves, almost never to the teacher. Sharing is usually done without opportunities for students to revise based on responses received from their listeners. When sharing is called for, neither the teacher's manuals nor the student texts demonstrate how to

respond to writers or how writers can make use of the responses they receive. Calkins (1985) devotes considerable attention to the importance of sharing, as well as learning how to respond or make use of responses. She advises that teachers model appropriate conferencing techniques in share sessions with individual students and groups. Calkins finds that continued practice is required before students become competent at forms of self-sharing. This advice appears to be unheeded by the writers of language arts programs.

Revision, which has perhaps received more attention than any of the other aspects of the writing process (Barrs, 1983; Graves, 1983), is seldom included in textbook extended writing activities. When the textbooks require students to revise, an emphasis is placed on editing surface features of text to conform to standard writing conventions. Revising meaning related content is not highlighted. When textbooks provided students with editing or proofreading checklists, only a small proportion or none of the items on the checklists attended to meaning. It is editing, not revising, in which stucents are more likely to receive instruction. The textbooks teach students to use appropriate proofreading symbols to track carefully across each line of print and search for mistakes to correct.

In process-approach lessons described by Graves (1983) and Calkins (1983, 1985), students keep writing folders in which they save their drafts and final products. Students then select from their finals products those works they would like to bring to published form. Graves and Calkins call for frequent publishing

and using collections of students works as materials for instruction in both writing and reading. Publishing, as it occurs in the language arts textbooks, hardly fits Graves' and Calkins' descriptions. First, the textbooks seldom call for publishing. Second, students have no control over which of their works are published. Instead, the textbooks instruct teachers to post the class's products, all written on the same topic, on bulletin boards or in single bound volumes.

In 1977, Graves drew these conclusions about the language arts textbooks that he surveyed, "the teaching of writing is basically a situation in which the teacher chooses the genre, the unit at which the student will write (paragraph, sentence), and the topic or story starter. The majority of the books attend to getting the writer going." (p. 822). The same can be said about the textbooks published nearly a decade later. In addition, it appears that textbook publishers have made few concessions to the role of the writing process in developing student writing competency.

It is concluded that, on average, students receive in their language arts textbooks opportunities to write one piece of extended writing per week. Typically, the topic of this piece is selected by the language arts text, there is no pre-writing activity that precedes it, the piece is not shared, revised, or published and when it is revised, attention is paid to surface features, not content.

Most likely, given demands for teacher accountability, textbooks will continue to be used for writing instruction. How then can they be improved to become more consistent with recent

knowledge about writing processes and writing instruction? First, students need to be provided with more opportunities to write extended discourse. This could be accomplished by moving all extended writing activities to the central part of the lesson and placing nonextended writing activities in the supplemental section, to be used with discretion. Second, writing mechanics can be addressed in either the supplemental nonextended activities or, preferably, at the time of editing students' extended writing. Finally, directions for extended writing activities need to consistently provide students with opportunities to generate lists of writing topics, to engage in varied pre-writing activities, to share their works with teachers and peers, to revise using respondents' comments, and to publish selected final products. In addition to providing such opportunities, language arts textbooks could do a great deal to improve writing and writing instruction if they would help to show teachers and students <u>how</u> to select topics, pre-write, share, revise, and publish.

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Table 1

Total Number (and Percentage *) of Writing Activities by Program and Grade Level

	Scott, Foresman (1984)	Harper & Row (1983)	Macmillan (1979)	Combined Programs
Grade Level:				
1	51 (.04)	28 (.02)	13 (.03)	92 (.03)
2	56 (.05)	132 (.10)	21 (.05)	209 (.07)
3	235 (.20)	232 (.17)	82 (.19)	549 (.19)
4	267 (.23)	329 (.25)	91 (.21)	687 (.23)
5	244 (.21)	294 (.22)	112 (.26)	650 (.22)
6	308 (.27)	322 (.24)	109 (.25)	739 (.25)
Total	1161 (1.00)	1337 (1.00))	428 (1.00)	2926 (1.00)

* The denominator for all percentages was the total number of writing activities for each program or the combined programs.

Table 2

Number (and Percentage *) of Process-Approach Components in Extended Writing Activities

	Scott, Foresman (1984)	Harper & Row (1983)	Macmillan (1979)	Combined Programs
Selecting Topics	169 (.22)	50 (.08)	51 (.22)	270 (.16)
Pre-writing	338 (.43)	273 (.43)	153 (.65)	764 (.46)
Sharing	222 (.28)	126 (.20)	108 (.46)	456 (.27)
Revising	55 (.07)	12 (.02)	40 (.17)	107 (.06)
Publishing	58 (.07)	34 (.05)	28 (.12)	120 (.07)

* The denominator for all percentages was the total number of extended writing activities in all grade levels for each program or the combined programs.

Table 3

Number (and Percentage *) of Sharing in Extended Writing Activities

	Scott, Foresman (1984)	Harper & Row (1983)	Macmillan (1979)	Combined Programs
Respondent:				
Teacher	0 (.00)	0 (.00)	3 (.01)	3 (.002)
Class	146 (.19)	40 (.06)	64 (.27)	250 (.15)
Peer	27 (.03)	16 (.02)	4 (.02)	47 (.03)
Self	49 (.06)	70 (.11)	37 (.16)	156 (.09)
Purpose:				
Revise	56 (.07)	16 (.03)	37 (.16)	109 (.06)
Present	166 (.21)	110 (.17)	71 (.30)	330 (.20)

* The denominator for all percentages was the total number of extended writing activities in all grade levels for each program or the combined programs.

Table 4

Number (and Percentage *) of Revision in Extended Writing Activities

	Scott, Foresman (1984)	Harper & Row (1983)	Macmillan (1979)	Combined Programs
Content	3 (.004)	1 (.002)	0 (.00)	4 (.002)
Surface Features	20 (.02)	8 (.01)	18 (.08)	46 (.03)
Content & Surface Features	32 (.04)	3 (.005)	22 (.09)	57 (.03)

* The denominator for all percentages was the total number of extended writing activities in all grade levels for each program or the combined programs.